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RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0866
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L NIAMEY 000854

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DEPT FOR AF, AF/W, INR/AA AND DRL
PARIS FOR AF WATCHER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/03/2019
TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM NG
SUBJECT: NIGER: PRIME MINISTER GAMATIE MEETING WITH
AMBASSADOR ALLEN

REF: A. NIAMEY 809
 B. NIAMEY 826
 C. NIAMEY 492

Classified By: Ambassador Bernadette M. Allen, Reasons: 1.4 b/d

Reftel: a) Niamey 809 b) Niamey 826 c) Niamey 492

¶1. (C) Summary: On November 2, Government of Niger (GON) Prime Minister (PM) Ali Badjo Gamatie held a meeting with Ambassador Allen (Embassy PolOff was note taker) that broached a wide scope of topics, ranging from the ongoing peace process in the North, the current political situation and discussion of a way forward out of the current political conundrum, regional security and food security. Gamatie stated he accepted the PM position because his country needs him. He added that "the opposition knows that I am their only hope to remedy the current political impasse." (Note: This is the first of three cables detailing the meeting between the Ambassador and PM. End note). End Summary.

¶2. (U) On November 2, recently-appointed PM Gamatie (ref a) invited the Ambassador to his office to discuss security issues and the current political situation in Niger. Gamatie stated he is a product of USG training, having participated in a USAID-funded statistics study program in the 1980's at the U.S. Census Bureau. He informed the Ambassador that he has been meeting with partners to "explain the current political situation."

Road Map: Get Everyone Onboard

¶3. (SBU) The PM opened the meeting by stating that the road map to breaking the political impasse is simple, "get everyone on board." He stressed that he did not seek the PM slot, that President Tandja twice asked him to take the position and, in the end, he acquiesced because he "didn't want to turn his back on his country and the Nigerien people at a time of need."

Lack of Cohesion among Opposition Members

¶4. (SBU) Gamatie spoke of incohesiveness among opposition members. Pointing out that "some members of the opposition are not even talking to each other", he opined that "sometimes the opposition and civil society members get carried away in the fighting and don't know when to stop." Gamatie stated his desire to organize a national dialogue. He believes, however, the opposition wants the dialogue to take place in Abuja and cited that as the reason he believes opposition members continue to visit Abuja to pressure the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to impose sanctions on Niger. Gamatie insisted that negotiations

shouldn't take place in Abuja, that the dialogue should take place in Niger. He accepted as a given the future engagement of the ECOWAS Mediator, former Nigerian President Abdulsalami Abubakar, in any future dialogue between the GON and opposition members. Gamatie believes there are areas on which the opposition and GON can agree to resolve the current political discord. (Note: He mentioned plans for imminent travel to Abuja to help promote the GON's dialogue with ECOWAS. Ambassador subsequently learned that Gamatie and Foreign Minister (FM) Mindaoudou both traveled to Abuja to participate in a November 3 meeting. End note.)

GON Should Have Been Present at ECOWAS Meeting

¶15. (C) The PM stated that the GON erred in not sending a representative to the October 17 ECOWAS meeting (ref b). He noted he was visiting neighboring states at the time the ECOWAS Summit was held, that FM Mindaoudou was attending a meeting in Paris and that President Tandja didn't attend the Summit because he doesn't like to travel. He stated that the GON now realizes it should have been represented at the ECOWAS meeting. According to Gamatie, the GON learned that Nigerian President Yar'Adua became furious after learning the GON did not send representation to participate in the Summit in Abuja, consequently, ECOWAS issued a declaration unfavorable to Niger.

Unpatriotic Nigeriens

¶16. (C) Ambassador asked Gamatie why members of the opposition are being labeled as "unpatriotic." Gamatie replied that certain opposition members are plotting against the Republic of Niger (RON). He stated the GON became aware that some opposition members, with close ties to ECOWAS parliamentarians

(especially those representing Nigeria), secretly pressured ECOWAS leadership to impose sanctions on Niger. He suggested such action is the reason behind the GON accusations that certain opposition members are acting unpatriotic.

¶17. (C) Gamatie indicated that some opposition members have privately conveyed to GON leaders a willingness to work with Gamatie, despite concerns he may not have the political clout within the Cabinet to make tangible changes. He added that President Tandja's October 8 decision to delegate certain powers to the Prime Minister was "a major step within the framework of power" that will permit him to negotiate with the opposition. When Ambassador Allen inquired whether eliminating President Tandja's three-year extension is included among issues negotiable, the PM responded that only matters within the scope of his power may be negotiated and that the three-year extension was not included within his scope of power. He stated, "the opposition knows that I am their only hope to advance the political situation. We can move forward or stay in the same situation."

¶18. (C) Gamatie spoke of accusations being hurled by both sides. He was dismayed at the opposition refusal to hold discussions with the GON on claims that "the GON is not democratic." He added that, on the other hand, President Tandja's has accused opposition of stealing money and that members within Tandja's camp want to eliminate the opposition. He stated, "I don't see any concrete dialogue, just political posturing."

Cabinet needs Overhaul

¶19. (C) Gamatie expressed the desire for a smaller Cabinet, comprised of competent people with the right qualifications for their positions. He added that some Cabinet members fear and do not want to see any changes.

¶10. (C) Gamatie discussed the international arrest warrant issued by the GON on October 31 against opposition leader Mahamadou Issoufou, President of the Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS). Issoufou was in Abuja at the time the warrant was issued. Gamatie stressed that he had not been informed of the warrant and that he first learned of the warrant on the local news. He emphasized that the moment he learned of the warrant, he contacted the Ministers of Interior (Albade Adouba) and Justice (Garba Lombo) to inquire why he hadn't been consulted before the warrant was issued. Reportedly the former claimed to not have known about the warrant, while the latter reported that the instructions came

from a high authority and that the Interior Minister knew the warrant would be issued. Gamatie said he expressed disapproval to both Ministers and promptly ordered them to rescind the warrant. He subsequently phoned PNDS Vice President Bazoum Mohamed to assure him that Issoufou would not be arrested if he returned home. Gamatie asserted that Issoufou later returned to Niamey without incident.

What Political Changes Need to Take Place

¶11. Gamatie probed the Ambassador for suggestions on how the GON could return to the USG good graces. He asked, "What type of political shift would have to take place for the USG to lift sanctions." The Ambassador responded that while the final decision making rests with Washington, she thought a good starting place would be holding a free and fair Presidential election in the very near future. She stressed that the human rights situation needs improvement as well, from stopping the arrests of members of the media who report on the political situation to intimidation and arrests of opposition members.

Dissolution of the Constitutional Court

¶12. (SBU) The PM asked the Ambassador for her opinion of the President's dissolution of the Constitutional Court in May 2009 (ref b). She responded that the judiciary is one of the branches in government that fills a role of checks and balances in a democracy. She noted that with the prior dissolution of the National Assembly, the subsequent dissolution of the Court removed the remaining check against the executive branch. Gamatie admitted he initially criticized the decision, but added he has now become aware of information that revealed the Court was politicized, notably that several judges had relationships with opposition members. Gamatie stated the Constitutional Court, comprised of seven members, designates the longest serving court member to issue final rulings. He said that when court members learned on June 11 the elder judge had decided in President

Tandja's favor, to overturn the May 2009 decision that declared the holding of the referendum as unconstitutional, they decided to boycott the elder judge's decision and issued on June 12 their own judgment. He suggested that President Tandja dissolved the Court because he perceived the decision had been politicized and, consequently, declared the Court incompetent. Gamatie stressed that the GON was right in its intentions, but handled the matter in the wrong way. He concluded the GON was right to dissolve the Court, but failed to do a good job of explaining to the international community and people of Niger the rationale behind the Court's dissolution. (Note: Gamatie, despite not being in Niger at the time of the Court's actions, claimed to now possess documentary proof that the court had been politicized. End note.)

Comment

¶13. (C) Gamatie is a confident, gregarious individual. He is an accomplished economist who studied in the United States in the 1980's under a USAID-funded program at the U.S. Census Bureau. Gamatie stated, "President Tandja is not a good communicator and has an incompetent cabinet." He then tempered his remarks by praising President Tandja for delegating to him the necessary powers to help mediate the current political impasse. He claimed confidence that he can effectively work with both the opposition and the GON, but added he hopes he hasn't stretched himself too much by accepting the PM slot, as he knows negotiating an agreement will not be easy.

¶14. (U) Gamatie closed the meeting by stating he previously enjoyed excellent relationships with former U.S. Ambassadors accredited to Niger and declared his door open to Ambassador Allen at any time. End comment.

ALLEN